

Health habits you must make time for



Squeeze in these easy little moves—no matter how crazy-busy your day becomes—and you could add years to your life. You know, so you can check off everything *e/*se on your to-do list. **BY JUNO DEMELO**

Pack a snack

“You’re bound to overeat at dinner if you don’t have a midafternoon snack,” says registered dietitian Keri Gans, author of *The Small Change Diet*. “And since food is energy, if you skip it, you’ll be tired, too.” She recommends preportioned options, like a healthy snack bar. (Look for one with fewer than 200 calories and at least 3 grams of fiber and 5 grams of protein.) That way you don’t have to test your willpower a quarter of the way through a bag of chips.

Brew some tea

People who drink two to three cups a day of green tea are nearly 15 percent less likely to suffer a stroke, research in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* shows. One explanation: “Green tea contains antioxidants that keep your blood platelets flowing by making your arteries less sticky,” says Penny Kris-Etherton, Ph.D., a distinguished professor of nutrition at Penn State University and chair of the AHA’s nutrition committee.

Get a little fresh air

Spending time in nature can actually decrease blood flow to a part of the brain you use to dwell on things, a Stanford University study suggests. Scientists can’t yet explain the neurological effects of nature, but we’ll say this: There’s nothing quite like a breathtaking view to remind you of the bigger picture (or just help you get away from whoever’s bugging you). So throw on your coat, head out for a few minutes, and let that winter air blast away your worries.

Set your alarm

Waking to the sound of your favorite workout music may be the extra push you need to get up and get moving, says Alison Phillips, Ph.D., director of the Healthy Habits Lab at Iowa State University. When you’re exercising regularly, your usual playlist can become a cue to move: “You hear it and you immediately want to work out,” she says. Get Nightstand Central for the iPhone or Gentle Alarm for Android and then set it to your get-fit anthem.



Water your plants

Experts have known for a while now that houseplants absorb air pollutants that can cause headaches, nausea, and fatigue. But they may also boost your productivity by 15 percent, a European study suggests. And yeah, they can only do all that stuff if they’re alive. Keep yours going by giving them a good soak whenever the top inch of soil feels dry, advises Weston Miller, an associate professor of consumer horticulture at Oregon State University.

Stretch

“In today’s digital world, poor posture is inevitable,” says Jimmy Minardi, a yoga instructor in New York City. To loosen stiff back muscles and engage your core, when you’re sitting: Grab the back of your chair with your right hand and the arm of your chair with your left, then gently twist your torso to the right, and repeat on the other side. The payoff: People who sit up straight are more physically resilient than those who slump, a report in *Health Psychology* shows.

Say thanks

Gratitude is associated with greater happiness, so jot down something you’re thankful for every day. Stressed? “Remember, you wouldn’t fret over stuff that didn’t matter to you,” says Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., author of *The Upside of Stress*. Which means you can even choose to be grateful for those stress-inducers. Say you are caring for an aging parent: It’s hard... but it’s also a chance to strengthen your relationship. Go on a hunt for *your* silver lining!

Go to bed the right way

Lie on your side, bend your knees, and put a pillow between them. “Sleeping in this position can take strain off your lower back,” says Holly Phillips, M.D., author of *The Exhaustion Breakthrough*. And it may also help remove proteins from the brain—the buildup of which can contribute to the development of Alzheimer’s disease—by improving circulation in the head and neck, research shows. All of that while you were *sleeping*. Amazing.